MEDITATION FOR BEGINNERS

BY

J. I. WEDGWOOD

Price: Ninepence net

MEDITATION FOR BEGINNERS

By

J. I. WEDGWOOD

The Theosophical Publishing House Ltd.
38 Great Ormond Street
London
W.C.
1

Sold by
The Theosophical Press
Wheaton, Illinois

Third Edition
Revised and Enlarged 1918
Reprint . . . 1919
Reprint . . . 1926

Made and Printed in
Great Britain by Percy Lund
Humphries & Co. Ltd.
The Country Press
Bradford

NOTE

The following books may be studied in continuation of this essay: Mrs. Besant's *Thought Power: Its Control and Culture; The Masters; The Spiritual Life; Theosophy and the New Psychology; An Introduction to Yoga; In the Outer Court; The Path of Discipleship;* Mr. Leadbeater's *The Inner Life; Invisible Helpers;* Mr. Krishnamurti's *At the Feet of the Master;* Mabel Collins' *The Transparent Jewel;* Mrs. Ames' *Meditations*, and various works of devotion.

The writer wishes to express his gratitude to Mrs. Besant, who first disclosed to him the true place of meditation in the spiritual life and instructed him in its scientific practice, and to Mrs. Marie Russak for constant inspiration and many valuable hints in its detailed application.

Withdraw into yourself and look. And if you do not find yourself beautiful as yet, do as does the creator of a statue that is to be made beautiful; he cuts away here, he smooths there, he makes this line lighter, this other purer, until he has shown a beautiful face upon the statue. So do you also; cut away all that is excessive, straighten all that is crooked, bring light to all that is shadowed, labour to make all glow with beauty, and do not cease chiselling your statue until there shall shine out on you the godlike splendour of virtue, until you shall see the final goodness surely established in the stainless shrine.

Plotinus on the Beautiful
(Trans. by STEPHEN MACKENNA).

MEDITATION FOR BEGINNERS

IT is significant of the spiritual tendency of the Theosophical Society that whereas some years ago few members outside the Inner Section troubled their heads about meditation, many now desire help and guidance as to its practice. Within that Inner Section of the Theosophical Society (called the E.S.) very definite and helpful instruction is available for earnest and approved students; but there are many who, perhaps for domestic or other reasons, do not feel free to undertake the heavy responsibility implied in joining this—for to enter the E.S. implies that Theosophy is thenceforward to become a dominant factor in the life. Such members often wish to learn how to meditate, and in some cases welcome joyfully the opportunity of working in one of the groups for meditation which have become an important feature of the Society's work within recent years; and it is with the hope of aiding this large class of earnest and spiritually-minded people that these present suggestions are put forward. Also, it may be pointed out, it is only possible to gain admission to the E.S. after two years' membership in the outer Society, and during this preliminary period much of the necessary spadework may be accomplished, with the result that the aspirant will be better fitted for the training of the E.S. and of greater service to its corporate life.

The present hints are written more especially for Theosophists, although they may be found helpful by others who have not yet embraced the philosophy of life summed up under the name of Theosophy. This

course has been followed quite advisedly, for the author believes that it is of little use to set to work upon the serious practice of meditation until the teachings regarding the control and use of thought and emotion set forth in Theosophical books have been mastered, and until the aspirant has emerged from the *dilettante* stage of occultism. Until then he will derive more benefit from quiet reflection upon devotional books or from the practice of the earlier methods laid down in the various exoteric religions. For more advanced students, following other methods of study, he does not profess to write.

WHAT MEDITATION IS

Meditation consists in the endeavour to bring into the waking consciousness, that is, into the mind in its normal state of activity, some realisation of the super-consciousness, to create by the power of aspiration a channel through which the influence of the Divine or spiritual principle—the real man—may irradiate the lower personality. It is the reaching out of the mind and feelings towards an ideal, and the opening of the doors of the imprisoned lower consciousness to the influence of that ideal. "Meditation," says H. P. Blavatsky, "is the inexpressible longing of the inner man for the Infinite."

The ideal chosen may be abstract—it may be a virtue, such as sympathy or justice; it may be the thought of the Inner Light, of that Divine Essence

which is the innermost reality of man's nature: it may even be recognised only as a vague and dim sensing of the highest that is in us. Or the ideal may be personified as a Master, a Divine Teacher—indeed it may be seen as embodied in anyone whom we feel in any way to be worthy of our respect and admiration. Consequently the subject and type of meditation will vary widely according to the temperament and "ray" of the individual. But in all cases it is essentially the uplifting of the soul towards its Divine source, the desire of the particularised self to become one with the Universal Self.

FIRST STEPS

The first step in meditation consists in cultivating the thought, until it becomes habitual, that the physical body is an instrumeut of the spirit.

Those who have only just made the acquaintance of Theosophical thought find it difficult at first to reverse their point of view; to them the soul and spirit are unreal. The planes and bodies, of which Theosophical writers speak in their endeavour to convey clearly and with scientific precision some little glimpse of the mysteries of man's being, are memorised in terms of some text-book diagram, each name being conjured up with an effort of memory. The physical body is the one tangible reality and the superphysical the shadowy and vague, a mere intellectual conception. But gradually and almost imperceptibly this feeling is lost; a feeling of *realisation* of the superphysical begins to

work down into the physical brain and to enliven what was previously merely an intellectual theory. The reason for this is not far to seek. To read Theosophical books is to place oneself in touch with powerfully stimulating forces in the world of mental archetypes; to read of higher bodies tends by directing the attention to those bodies to awaken self-consciousness in them. Interest in and study of the astral plane and the astral body gradually "waken" the student on that plane during physical sleep. The stimulation of the higher bodies into greater activity is also assisted by being more within the aura of superphysically developed people. As a natural result this expansion of the inner nature begins to modify the waking consciousness, the knowledge of the Higher Man slowly filters down into the physical brain, and the student will find his outlook on life undergoing great change. An extension of consciousness becomes noticeable, new vistas of thought and feeling open up before him, his surroundings in life assume a fresh significance as he awakens to them, and the truths of Theosophy begin to change from intellectual theory into spiritual experience.

Such, briefly stated, is the rationale of the gradual expansion of consciousness, which comes within the early experience of most Theosophists who are really in earnest; and we may, in passing, hazard the idea that the two years that must elapse before a student is eligible for the E.S. are prescribed not only that his steadfastness in Theosophy may be tested, but also that time may be allowed for this change in the

super-physical bodies, through which he may come intuitively to feel himself as the Hlgher Man using a physical instrument.

Now this process of expansion and awakening may be materially quickened. "Help Nature," says *The Voice of the Silence*, "and work on with her; and Nature will regard thee as one of her creators and make obeisance." A modern scientific writer has echoed the same truth in the words "Nature is conquered by obedience"; we have but to understand the laws of nature, and then, rightly selected and applied, they become our obedient servants. That which takes place slowly and gradually in the ordinary course of time may be deliberately hastened by intelligent and well-directed effort. Hence the student's first exercise in meditation may fittingly have in view this aim of consciously realising the Higher Man.

The following practice is one which the present writer employed with good result, until it became unnecessary to continue with it.

MEDITATION ON THE BODIES. Let the student begin by thinking of the physical body; then consider how it is possible to control and direct it, and thus separate himself in thought from it—regarding it as a vehicle, and picture himself for a few moments as living in the astral body. Let him reflect, in turn, that he can control his emotions and desires; and, with a strong effort, repudiate the astral body and realise that he is not this body of surging and struggling passions, desires and emotions. Then let him picture himself as living in the mental body; and reflect again that he can control

his thoughts, that he has the power of setting his mind to think on any subject he pleases, and again with an effort repudiate the mental body. The student should now let himself soar into the free atmosphere of the spirit where is eternal peace, and, resting there for a period, strive with great intensity to realise that That is the real Self.

Let him now descend again, carrying with him the peace of the spirit through the different bodies. Let him picture the aura of the mental body raying out around him, and let the influence of peace suffuse it, as he affirms that he is the Self which uses the mental body as an instrument in his service. Then descending into the astral body, again let the peace ray out through the aura, as he affirms that he is that which uses the emotions as his servants; and lastly, let him return to the physical body, recognising it as an instrument, and as a centre of the Divine Peace, wherever it may pass in the world.

The exercise may at first seem strange and fruitless, for the physical body is still the great reality, and thought and feeling are still apt to be regarded as products of the physical brain. The beginner must remember that he is seeking to undo the thought-habit of years, and therefore must not be impatient for immediate results. Possibly much time may elapse before his intuition assures him with unerring certainty that there is a Higher Power within him, guiding his actions and shaping his course through life. Quite naturally, he may dread the possibility of self-hypnosis the thought that he may by slow degrees be deluding

himself into beliefs which are fanciful and have no foundation of reality. To the well-balanced mind the earlier stages are by far the most difficult, for there is a natural caution about venturing into the unknown, and the tendency to beat a mental retreat at each suspicion of danger. None the less, it is only reasonable to give due trial to a system expounded by the greatest minds of antiquity, prescribed in all the great religions and witnessed to by eminently sane and sincere people of the present day. And a little steady and persistent practice is bound to lead to certain results. How definite those results will be and with what degree of rapidity they will be apparent will naturally depend upon the temperament, the industry and the possibilities of the individual.

A MORE ELABORATE FORM OF THE ABOVE. As the beginner grows more familiar with the meditation outlined above, he may begin to elaborate it, according to the bent of his temperament. He may find it helpful, for instance, to consider the simile of a pianoforte and a pianist. As the pianoforte produces sound and ordered music, so the brain and physical body give expression to thought, feeling and ordered activity. But it is the pianist who expresses himself through the medium of the instrument. In the same way the physical body (in its voluntary activities) does but vibrate in response to the Higher Man.

Detaching himself in thought from the physical body and examining it in the cool discrimination of the mind, he should endeavour to realise that it is only a vehicle, an instrument, a vesture of flesh. In

order that the consciousness, which is the manifestation of the spirit, can contact the physical world it must inhabit a tabernacle of physical matter, kith and kin with that physical world, for only a physical vehicle of consciousness can make vibratory relationship with physical matter. By the multiplicity of experiences to be gained from the physical world and the gradual shaping of the physical instrument to respond to them, the spirit unfolds its innate powers from latency into potency.

He may then consider how it is possible to control and direct it, how it responds to the behests of the governing Intelligence—the I. Thus separating himself in thought from it, he should next picture himself for a few moments as living in the astral body.

Let him reflect, in turn, that the astral body is not his real self. He can control his emotions and desires, he can regulate the play of feeling. His emotions are but one aspect of his consciousness working in and limited by the astral body, which, in its turn, is a tenement builded up from the material of the astral plane, that the indwelling consciousness may come into relation therewith. He himself is not this body of struggling, surging emotions, passions and desires. In his calmer moments he knows that he is above the surge of emotions. His fits of passion, of jealousy, of fear, of selfishness and hatred—all these are not himself but the play of emotions which have slipped beyond control, as a greyhound may slip from his leash. In his heart of hearts he knows that as much of this is already under his control, so by dint of patient perseverance

and earnest endeavour all may in course of time be brought within due bounds, and mastery of the emotions be gained.

Thus standing as it were outside of his emotions, looking down upon the whole sphere of their activity, let him next picture himself as living in the mental body.

It is not difficult for the beginner to separate himself from his physical and emotional bodies—he has been taught in the practice of ordinary morality to check and control actions and violent emotion ; but he has probably never been taught much of the power of thought, and accordingly he finds it difficult to realise at first the possibility of controlling his thought.

Yet he has the power to set his mind upon any subject he pleases, and by dint of perseverance he may learn to keep it fixed thereupon. And eventually he may gain such control of the mind as to be able to dismiss from it at will any unwelcome thought.

And so, passing through the various stages, he may raise himself into the contemplation of That which is beyond words, ineffably real and sacred, reaching the very shrine of his own being, the altar upon which the Divine Shekinah itself is made manifest, and bearing with him that radiance into the outer world of sense.

When the student by his meditation and by his oft-repeated thought during the day has grown to regard himself as the Inner Man, working outwards into the world through the instrumentality of a physical body,

he may then pass on to more elaborate and scientific forms of meditation. He should begin to work with fuller understanding of its various details and stages, regarding it as at once a means of spiritual refreshment and growth and a science of wrestling with the wayward mind and feelings.

CONCENTRATION

Meditation is often divided into three stages: Concentration, Meditation, Contemplation. It may be still further sub-divided, but it is unnecessary to do so here; on the other hand the beginner should bear in mind that meditation is a science of a life-time, so that he must not expect to attain to the stage of pure contemplation in his earlier efforts.

Concentration consists in focusing the mind on one idea and holding it there. Patanjali, the author of the classic Hindu *Yoga Aphorisms*, defines Yoga as "the hindering of the modifications of the thinking principle." This definition is applicable to concentration, though Patanjali probably goes further in his thought and includes the cessation of the image-making faculty of the mind and of all concrete expressions of thought, thus virtually passing beyond the stage of mere concentration into that of contemplation.

To be able to concentrate, then, it is necessary to gain control of the mind and learn by gradual practice to narrow down the range of its activity, until it becomes one-pointed. Some idea or object is selected upon which to concentrate, and the initial step is to shut out all else from the mind, to exclude therefrom

the stream of thoughts alien to the subject, as they dance before the mind like the flickering pictures of the cinematograph. It is true that much of the student's practice must in the initial stages take this form of repeated exclusion of thought; and to set oneself to do this is excellent training. But there is another and far sounder way of attaining concentration; it consists in becoming so interested and absorbed in the subject selected that all other thoughts are *ipso facto* excluded from the mind. We are constantly doing this in our daily lives, unconsciously and by force of habit. The writing of a letter, the adding of accounts, the taking of weighty decisions, the thinking out of difficult problems—all these things so engross the mind as to induce a state of more or less wrapt concentration. The student must learn to accomplish this at will, and will best succeed by cultivating the power and habit of observing and paying attention to outer objects.

Let him take any object—a penholder, a piece of blotting paper, a leaf, a flower—and note the details of its appearance and structure which usually pass by unnoticed; let him catalogue one by one its properties, and presently he will find the exercise of absorbing interest. If he is able to study the process of its manufacture or growth, the interest will again be heightened. No object in nature is in reality entirely dull and uninteresting; and when anything seems to us so it is rather that the failure to appreciate the wonder and beauty of its manifestation lies in our own inattentiveness.

As an aid to concentration, it is well to repeat aloud the ideas that pass through the mind. So: this penholder is black; it reflects the light from the window from some portions of its surface; it is about seven inches in length, cylindrical; its surface is engraved with a pattern; the pattern is branch-shaped and is formed of a series of closely-marked lines—and so forth *ad libitum*.

In this way the student learns to shut out the larger world and to enclose himself in the smaller world of his choice. When this has been done successfully he has achieved a certain degree of concentration—for it is evident that there are still many and various thoughts running through the mind, though all on the subject of the penholder. The speaking aloud helps to slow down this stream of thought and to hinder the mind from wandering. Gradually by practice he learns to narrow down still further the circle of thought until literally he can reach one-pointedness of mind.

The above practice is somewhat in the nature of drill instruction; it requires a degree of strenuous application, and, moreover, may appear somewhat cold to the student, since it arouses little emotion. Another exercise in concentration may therefore be taken concurrently, but before describing this we may say that the former exercise must needs be mastered at some stage of the student's career. Some degree of mastery therein is a preliminary to successful visualisation—that is, the power of mentally reproducing an object in accurate detail without it being visible to the eyes—and accurate visualisation is a

necessary feature of much of the work which is done by students trained in occult methods such as the deliberate construction of thought-forms and the creation of symbols by the mind in ceremonial. Accordingly the student who is really in earnest will not neglect this branch of work on account of it being difficult and requiring application. He will also set to work at visualisation, observing and carefully scrutinising an object, and then with the eyes closed endeavouring to build up a mental picture of it.

The second method, above referred to, is that of concentrating not upon a physical object but upon an idea. If some virtue be taken it has the advantage of arousing the enthusiasm and devotion of the student, and this is a very important consideration in the initial stages of his practice, when perseverance and steadfastness are often sorely tried. Moreover, the effort builds that virtue into the character. In this case the concentration is chiefly that of the feelings and less conspicuously a mental process. The student strives to reproduce in himself the virtue, let us say sympathy, at which he is aiming, and by dint of holding himself to a single emotion by the power of the will eventually succeeds in feeling sympathy. It is easier to be one-pointed in feeling than in thought, for the latter is more subtle and active; but if intense concentration of feeling can be induced, the mind will to a certain extent follow suit.

MEDITATION

Having thus considered concentration we can now pass on to the second main division of our subject—namely, meditation. Meditation is the art of considering a subject or turning it over in the mind in its various bearings and relationships. Properly speaking, the stage of meditation does not follow directly upon the complete one-pointedness of mind which we have discussed above, it rather succeeds that stage of comparative concentration which has banished from the mind all ideas alien to the one subject under consideration ; but efficiency in concentration will be required as each branch of the meditation is taken up. We need not occupy space with further definitions of meditation, but may at once pass on to certain schemes of practice which will illustrate its nature and method more clearly than theoretical dissertation. We have touched above on the thought of sympathy and may well use this here as a subject of meditation.

MEDITATION ON SYMPATHY. Reflect that like all other virtues this is an attribute of the Divine consciousness ; try to understand its nature and function in the world ; consider that it is a binding power uniting one particularised self to another. Compare it with love : sympathy implies understanding of another and the power to place one's self in his position ; love need not imply this understanding, it may consist only in the intense desire to give one's self to another, though it is more perfect when united with a sympathetic understanding ; on the other

hand, sympathy for its complete expression requires the strong inner motive power which love alone can supply. Picture the Divine sympathy as poured forth into the world through the Ideal Man—the Christ or the Master—and then as directed towards one's self individually.

The student should then with a strong active aspiration merge himself into the stream of this ineffable influence radiating from the Master, and so seek to reach the object of his devotion. (Here the stage of contemplation may be attained.) He should then think of this virtue as applied in his daily life, to his friends and loved ones—even to those with whom there is need for better understanding; let him picture them one by one before him and wrap them round with the influence which is pouring through him.

Another and more elaborate meditation may be given for the benefit of those who are unable to dwell for any length of time on a single thought.

MEDITATION TO EXPAND THE CONSCIOUSNESS. The student should raise his consciousness and contemplate the immensities of the universe; the picture of the star-lit heavens, the soft radiance of the sunset, or the thought of the cosmos enshrined within the infinitesimally minute atom, will aid him in this, and he may, if he so desire, use the method of rising through the bodies described earlier in this book. Let him then direct his thoughts in loftiest aspiration to the Logos of our system and picture the whole system as contained within the bounds of His consciousness: "In Him we live and move and

have our being." He may then follow out the line of thought developed in the pamphlet by Mrs. Besant entitled *On Moods*—namely, that though we might naturally think of the loftier members of the Hierarchy as being most distant from us and most beyond the reach of our halting aspiration owing to their remoteness from petty human interests, the reverse is actually true, and we are literally in closest touch with the all-embracing consciousness of the Logos. The student may find it helpful to think of the increasing size of the aura as spiritual development is achieved; of that of the ordinary man, of that of pupils and initiates, of the aura of the Master and the close relation of consciousness between the Master and His pupils and others whom He is helping, of the aura of the Lord Buddha which according to tradition extended three miles about His person; and so rising in thought he may conceive of a Being Whose aura or field of consciousness encompasses the whole of our planet and of One Who thus embraces the whole of the system to which we belong. Literally is it true that every action, every feeling and every thought to which we give expression are part of Him; nay, our very memory is part of His memory, for is not all remembrance but the power to touch the akashic records of nature, which is but the expression of Himself?

The student may then pass on to think of some of those qualities which we may associate with the manifestation of God in His world—let us take Justice, Beauty and Love; how that the Justice of

the Supreme is shown forth in the invariable laws of nature, the law of the conservation of energy, the dictum of Newton that action and re-action are equal and opposite, the law of karmic retribution which gives unto each man the just reward of his deeds. Let him think of what belief in karma really implies—the hand that strikes a grievous blow is one's own dead past come back to life again ; and from such reflections let him win content with that which is or may befall him. Let him think also of the innumerable relations under this law made between man and man, the weaving of God's plan in the universe, and see in those complex relationships the immutable law of perfect Justice.

Passing next to the aspect of Beauty he may study the exquisite plan of the Great Architect and Grand Geometrician of the Universe, and looking with closer attention at all created nature may perceive the universality of that aspect of the Supreme which expresses itself in Beauty or Harmony. Turning from beauty of nature to that created by man he may soar aloft on the wings of the imagination and contemplate the masterpieces of that human art which borders on the realm of Divinity, because in very truth the materials in the hand of the artist are the Divine powers of nature. Thus, in music, the mighty structures of sound reflect in many hues those archetypal forces of nature which stream forth through the blazing hosts of the Gandharvas, revealing to man the power of the Hidden Word and raising him aloft once more to the kingdom of his Divine heritage.

And in the Compassionate Love of the Supreme all human relationships of tenderness and love have their source. To the eye of the spirit the beauty of woman gives no cause for carnal desire, but is rather a reason that she should be respected as a child of God and a manifestation of His supreme Beauty. There is but one love throughout the universe, given by the Divine Father into the custody of His creatures; it is the one primal force which in its elementary creative aspect produces multiplicity of form and in its higher aspect draws souls together towards the Unity in the One Life.

CONTEMPLATION

To the beginner attempting the foregoing meditations they will at first probably appear little more than intellectual exercises, more or less interesting according to the bent of his temperament and capable of arousing a certain degree of feeling. But as he perseveres in his efforts and enters more into the wonder and beauty of the great concepts he is considering, he will gradually acquire something of that personal spiritual experience which spans the gulf between the man of knowledge and the man of wisdom, and he will attain to some realisation of that inner peace and exaltation of the soul, of which St. Alphonus de'Liguori speaks when he describes meditation as "the blessed furnace in which souls are inflamed with Divine love." For meditation harmonises the bodies in which we work, enabling the light of the spirit to shine down and illumine the dark recesses of our waking consciousness.

It stills the turmoil of our personalities—the mind, the emotions, the restless activity of the brain—and by reason of the synchronous vibration of the lower bodies enables the ego to influence the personality. And as the student thus grows richer in spiritual experience, he will find new phases of consciousness gradually opening up within him. Fixed in aspiration upon his ideal, he will presently become aware of the influence of that ideal raying down upon him, and as he makes one desperate effort to reach the object of his devotion, for one brief moment the flood-gates of heaven itself will be opened and he will find himself made one with his ideal and suffused with the glory of its realisation. These are the stages of contemplation and union. The former is the reaching upwards, when the more formal figures of the mind have been transcended, the latter is the attainment of that state of ecstasy of spirit, when the limits of the personality have fallen away and all shadow of separateness has vanished in the perfect union of object and seeker. It were idle to attempt further description of such experiences, for are they not beyond the reach of formulated utterance? Words can but serve as signposts pointing out the way to that which is ineffably glorious, so that the pilgrim may know whither to direct his steps.

THE SEARCH FOR THE MASTER

THE meditations outlined above will serve as a good groundwork for the beginner, and, if conscientiously followed, are bound to lead to good results. What precisely will be the value of these results will depend, of course, on the individual. But this growth into the inner life of spiritual experience may be hastened by taking advantage of certain opportunities which are the privilege of the Theosophist. No earnest student can be long a Fellow of the Theosophical Society without realising that the keystone of our whole spiritual edifice is the conception of the Masters, and that Their power is the very life-blood of the Society. We are told that the Society was founded by the Brothers of the Great White Lodge, to be in a special sense Their instrument in the world; if this be true, the opportunities of the Theosophist must be transcendently wonderful. It rests with the beginner to prove this great fact for himself, as others have proved it before him.

It was stated once by Mrs. Besant that a Master said that when a person joins the Theosophical Society he is connected with Them by a tiny thread of life. This thread is the line of magnetic *rapport* with the Master, and the student may by arduous effort, by devotion and unselfish service, strengthen and enlarge the thread until it becomes a line of living light. The Masters take as pupils those who offer the necessary special qualifications. The fact that there are few who

attain this exceptional privilege need in no way deter the earnest student, for there are many below the stage of pupilage in whom the Master takes an interest and whom He will aid from time to time either in a general way or with special attention. Indeed, it may be said that there is a constant pressure of the Masters' force behind the Society, so that members who will open themselves to it may become channels through which it will flow, enabling them to do in Their Name works greater than their own.

Realising all this, the earnest Theosophist in shaping his spiritual endeavour will in all probability desire to reach the Master, as the loftiest ideal within the range of his spiritual aspiration. How may he address himself to this task? Firstly, by faithful service—both in his daily life and to the Society which is the physical instrument of the Masters. Taking that for granted—and more will be said about this anon—how shall he proceed? The next step will depend on his temperament. He may picture to himself an Ideal Man, synthesising in Him the qualities and endowments of character which most strongly attract him, and endeavouring to perform all actions in His Name and to reach Him in his meditation. Others choose also a more concrete method and strive to reach the Great Ones through those who are Their pupils and initiated disciples in the outer world. Take those, for instance, who stand before us as the widely acknowledged leaders of the Theosophical movement. Those leaders represent to many of us the Masters Who stand behind the Society, and are the channels to the

Society of Their mighty influence. It is true that some people dislike intensely the attitude of hero-worship and devotion to persons ; such dislike springs too often alas ! from hopes in the past, disappointed and blasted, while in other cases it is undoubtedly more fundamental and a matter of temperament. The human instrument may, and generally does, show many imperfections ; the seeker certainly should not emulate these, but neither need he be troubled about them, for is not that which he reverences the ideal within the actual? "What, know you not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which is in you, which ye have of God . . ." (1 *Corinthians* VI., 19.) The characteristics that we admire in a man are the manifestations of the Divine Light shining through him, and that feeling of admiration is the response within ourselves to the ideal we see expressed in the other. Consequently, we can well afford to ignore what we consider the faults in others, and, whilst avoiding the foolish exaggeration of placing them on a pedestal, be grateful for the glimpses of the Divine Light they reveal to us. The advantage of this method of reaching the Master is that it gives to the student some ideal constantly within reach, definite and tangible to him. There are many who echo the cry of Lamartine that he had need of a God near and personal to him, a God Whose arms could encompass suffering humanity and Whose feet could be kissed by repentant sinners. The same thought, though with a different application, is expressed in the well-known text ". . . for he that loveth not his brother whom he

hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" (1 *John* IV., 20). Every regularly accepted chela of a Master, and still more every victor who has passed through the portals of Initiation, is a channel of the Master's influence; through him the Master can be reached. The Master has taken a certain definite responsibility for him, and he is an outpost of the Master's work in the world. Consequently any service done for him, is done also, in a sense, for the Master, even though it be merely in such small ways as in easing his labour or caring for his physical comfort, to say nothing of larger ways.

The bearing of all this will be perfectly plain to the student who has set his face seriously towards the goal with determination in his heart. In many ways he can place himself in close touch with, say, the President of the Theosophical Society. He can bring his mind into tune with hers through her books, her magazine writings, her lectures. Her photograph will help him to reach her in his meditation; and at regular intervals throughout the day he can fix her image in his mind and send her thoughts of love, devotion, gratitude and strength. On two points he should exercise scrupulous caution—namely, that his mind is pure and lofty and not filled with worldly thoughts as he directs it towards her—to this end a few moments may be given to a preliminary "tuning-up" or cleansing process; and secondly, that there should be no selfish expectation of help, of benefits or favours to be received in return. It is a point worth remembering in meditation, that if one seeks to draw down the ideal to oneself in personal

possession, or is semi-consciously looking for personal gratification or the sense of power or other selfish results, the effort will not be crowned with due success: what is needed is an act of pure unselfish aspiration, the soaring upward, with no thought save that of giving, to the object of one's adoration. Only when free from the taint of personal selfishness does the student's thought play at a sufficiently high level to open him to the inflow of higher influence.

Much success may ensue along these lines of effort; for the law is sure, and since the nearness of the ideal renders intensity of enthusiasm more likely, proportionately great will be the result. If the motive be kept utterly pure, and the thought of the Master constantly in the mind, the student may one day perceive that the influence he contacts may seem to issue through, rather than from, the person who embodies his ideal, and so may gradually raise himself into direct consciousness of the Master's presence.

It may be that at a lecture or a ceremonial or devotional gathering, he will become conscious of a Presence greater than that of the physical instrument, for the Masters frequently are pleased to bestow in person their benediction upon such meetings of earnest members.

And the student will find that whereas at first the Masters were to him merely an intellectual conception —a logical necessity in his scheme of philosophy— gradually, as his bodies grow more responsive to higher influences, they will become a living reality in his life, recognised and perceived by the heart as well as by the head.

THE BUILDING OF CHARACTER

Few words need be said upon this aspect of meditation, for it is comprised within what has already been stated. Meditation upon a virtue causes a man to grow gradually into the possession of that virtue ; it is the deliberate setting of the bodies to vibrate in response to the thought of that virtue, and the establishing of a habit of response thereto, for with every repetition of the thought its recurrence is made easier. It is finely said in a Hindu Scripture : " What a man thinks on that he becomes ; therefore think on the Eternal." Especially should the image-building faculty of the mind be utilised, side by side with strenuous efforts at the practice of the virtue desired. If a student lack courage, he should picture himself in circumstances requiring its display, and carry on a scene to a gallant conclusion. As in actual life occasions offer themselves for courageous conduct, the thought of courage will more and more readily fly to the mind, and a little effort at practice will speedily remedy the original defect.

It is well to take the various virtues as subjects of meditation, and by the exercise of the mind and power of the imagination train oneself to be able to *feel* them at will.

In the struggle to eradicate his faults one suggestion may prove useful to the student. The habit of brooding over faults does not lead to healthiness of mind, but is apt, rather, to encourage morbidness and depression, which act as a wall, shutting out

spiritual influences. As a practical expedient, it is better to ignore faults of disposition so far as may be done, and to concentrate one's whole aspiration and endeavour towards building the opposite virtues into the character.

A well-known writer and preacher has forcefully expressed this truth. "Remember you cannot see both sides of the coin at once. When you are discouraged by the striving of the animal nature, and utterly disgusted with yourself, and hating yourself as wholly unregenerate, the noblest exercise for your mental faculty is to force yourself to turn over the coin of yourself, and think intensely into the other side. Say, 'I am The Lord's . . . . my true ego is his Divine Spirit'" (*Light on the Problems of Life*, by Archdeacon Wilberforce).

Success in the spiritual life is gained less by fierce wrestling with the lower nature than by growing into the knowledge and appreciation of higher things. For once we have sufficiently experienced the bliss and joyousness of the higher life, by contrast the lower desires pale and lose their attractiveness. It was said once by a great Teacher that the best form of repentance for a transgression was to look ahead with hopeful courage, coupled with the firm resolve not to commit the transgression again.

PHYSICAL AIDS TO MEDITATION

ALTHOUGH the more important part of meditation has to do with the direction of the will, thought and feeling, it is obvious that we cannot dispense with the physical body, so that some hints as to physical plane procedure will not be out of place ; indeed they must necessarily be amongst the things which will engage the mind of the student who is entering upon the practice, as distinct from the theory, of meditation.

POSTURE

Just as certain thoughts and emotions will express themselves in characteristic movements and gestures of the body, so, by a reversal of the process, positions of the body may tend to induce states of mind and feeling, and to assist the student in dwelling on them. It is a matter of harmonising the physical body with the higher bodies and with the play upon it of the external forces of Nature.

In beginning meditation the student may adopt either of two postures recommended by experts in these matters: he may sit upright in a comfortable armchair, the back of which does not slope unduly ; the hands may be clasped and rest on the legs or be laid lightly on the knees ; and the feet be placed together or crossed with the right over the left.

The position should be easy and relaxed, the head not sunken upon the chest but lightly balanced, the eyes and mouth closed, and—as suggested by a well-known Indian writer on yoga—the spinal column,

along which there is much magnetic flow, erect. Or else he may sit in a similar position on a couch, stool or floor, cross-legged, in Eastern fashion. The locking of the extremities of the body is also recommended by authorities as preventing the outflow of magnetism, which is a natural phenomenon, from the finger-tips, feet, &c. The crossed-legged position is in some slight ways the more effectual, since magnetism so liberated is said to rise around the body in a protective shell. But it is an exceedingly inconvenient posture for most Western people, albeit in the East—whence most of our modern yoga teaching originates—the natural manner of being seated, and it has been wittily remarked by one writer that "the initial difficulties are many, but they are considerably enhanced by those who think it necessary to assume fantastic Eastern postures to annoy the body, which should be quiescent, if it is to be successfully ignored" (*Meditations*, by Alice C. Ames).

One position which should not be adopted, except in very rare cases, is that of lying down, for its natural tendency is towards sleep. Further, the brain cannot respond sympathetically to the higher vibrations of the superphysical bodies if the circulation of the blood be sluggish, hence the value of a cold tub or brisk walk before the morning practice.

BREATHING AND OTHER MATTERS

The postures of the body above recommended not only admit of, but may even be said to induce, full abdominal breathing, such as is practised by well-

trained singers. There is an intimate connection between profound meditation and breathing. George Fox, the Quaker, and some other Quietists claim to have received the gift of "internal respiration." It is found in actual practice, that as the body becomes harmonised in meditation the breathing grows deeper, regular and rhythmic, until by degrees it becomes so slow and quiet as to be almost imperceptible. This effect having been noticed, the process was reversed in *hatha yoga*, and by deliberate regulation of the breathing it was sought to harmonise the functions of the body, and finally the workings of the mind. But the student should be warned against the indiscriminate practice of breathing exercises spread broadcast in American New Thought books and Westernised yoga literature. To begin with, it is always more dangerous in psychic culture to work "from below up"; to play pranks with the physical body instead of taking to heart the profound teaching of *The Voice of the Silence*: "The Mind is the great Slayer of the Real. Let the Disciple slay the Slayer." The student will be better advised to learn control of thought along the lines of *raja yoga*, leaving his efforts at meditation to work their natural effect on the development of his physical body and the shaping of the psychic organs. Furthermore, that which can be practised with impunity in an Eastern body cannot always with equal suitability be tried on a Western body; and some of these breathing exercises are exceedingly dangerous and fraught with disastrous consequences. It may be said in passing there is no

objection to simple deep breathing, provided undue strain is not placed upon the heart and lungs and no attempt is made to concentrate the thought on the various centres of the body.

The student may find it helpful to burn a little good incense, for this purifies the "atmosphere" from the occult standpoint: he may also gain assistance from beautiful colours and pictures in his surroundings, flowers and other means of uplifting the mind and feelings.

He will also find it useful to observe certain dietetic restrictions, even going to the length of complete abstinence from alcohol and flesh-food, if that can be done without detriment to health. The taking of alcohol *pari passu* with the practice of strenuous meditation is apt to set up inflammatory symptoms in the brain—but the whole question is fully dealt with in Theosophical literature. (See Mrs. Besant's *Man and His Bodies*, Mr. Leadbeater's *Some Glimpses of Occultism*, Chap. X.)

TIMES

Another point not to be neglected is the question of hour. It is well—though not a *sine qua non*—that the times selected should be regularly adhered to: much of the initial difficulty of meditation springs from the automatic consciousness of the various bodies—called sometimes the elementals of the bodies—resisting with a sort of instinct, which if blind is nevertheless often extremely forceful, the attempt to impose upon them

new habits. The three periods of the day, around which so much symbolism is woven in Freemasonry, are stated to be most suitable magnetically—namely, when the sun is rising, at its meridian and when setting. These were the times selected by ancient devotees, though naturally they must be modified to suit the conditions of modern " civilised " life. In addition to these times, it is well if the habit can be cultivated of turning the mind for a moment at the stroke of every hour during waking life to the realisation of oneself as the Spiritual Man. This practice leads to what in Christian mystical theology is called " self-recollectedness," and it is the object of the student to train the mind to revert automatically to spiritual thoughts.

It is not well to meditate immediately after a meal or late at night; in the one case the process of thought withdraws the blood from aiding the digestive functions, in the other the bodies are tired and the etheric double more readily displaceable, and, moreover, the negative influence of the moon is operative, so that undesirable results are more liable to occur.

POSITIVITY AND PSYCHIC DEVELOPMENT

The system of meditation here laid before the student has, as its object, spiritual, mental and ethical development, and the control of the mind and feelings. It does not aim at developing psychic faculties " from below upwards." But its natural result may be to open up a form of intuitive psychism in persons of sufficiently sensitive organisation, which will show itself in increasing sensitiveness to the influence of

people and places, in the recalling of fragmentary memories of astral plane experiences from sleep, in greater susceptibility to direct guidance from the ego, in the power to recognise the influence of the Masters and spiritually developed people, and so forth.

There is one special contingency which the student following the methods of positive self-development here outlined should carefully avoid, and that is the development of passive mediumship and spirit control through negative methods of meditation—for, whatever may be the merits of spiritualism, the two systems are quite incompatible. For instance, in some books of Westernised yoga the student is instructed to begin meditation by rolling his eyes upwards and keeping them so fixed. The effect of this is to impose a strain on the visual mechanism and so to deaden somewhat the brain, with the result that a negative state of auto-hypnosis is induced, and semi-trance may supervene, accompanied by certain psychic manifestations. A similar result is obtained by the use of a crystal.

It is also apt to puzzle the student when writers tell him to open himself to spiritual influences and at the same time be positive. The difficulty arises through a confusion of stages. Positive effort is needed as a preliminary, and the passive condition follows later. The positive intensity of effort uplifts the consciousness to play through the higher levels of its different vehicles, or—to look at the matter differently—harmonises the vehicles, bringing them into synchronous relation with each other, so that the higher influence can play down; and only then is it safe to relax the

upward straining in the realisation of the peace thus attained. Perhaps, after all, the phrase " opening oneself to spiritual influences " in such a condition means nothing more than maintaining an attitude of intense stillness at a high spiritual level. The present writer once heard a similar point well illustrated by Monsignor Robert Hugh Benson. He instanced the picture of a sea-gull poised against the gale ; truly to the onlooker the bird seemed passive and immobile, nevertheless one knew there was a powerful effort continuously maintained in wing and pinion.

Now it is obvious that this intense stillness marks a stage separated by years of persistent effort from the attitude of people who assume they can reach great spiritual heights while flat on their backs in a warm and comfortable bed or even in a piping hot bath ! Such persons mistake for meditation what is merely bodily enfeeblement and an idle drifting of thought upon some soothing and agreeable topic. Not thus is the kingdom of heaven taken by storm !

Real meditation means strenuous effort, not the sensation of happiness which arises from a state of semi-somnolence and bodily luxury. Consequently, whilst those who are content to let their thoughts dwell lightly on New Thought affirmations may safely occupy as much time as they like in the process, the man who is beginning real concentration of thought should not at first exceed five or ten minutes at a stretch, otherwise he is apt to overtax the brain. Very gradually the interval may be lengthened to fifteen, twenty and thirty minutes.

RELAXATION

On the other hand the student will do well to remember that the natural effect of concentrating the mind is to produce tension of the muscles in the body. The familiar habit of knitting of brows is evidence of this bodily automatism. This tension of the muscles not only induces great bodily fatigue, but acts as an obstacle to the inflow of spiritual forces. Therefore the student should periodically in his meditation, and repeatedly during his daily life, turn his attention on the body and deliberately "let go" in relaxation. People of strong and intense natures often find difficulty in expressing themselves either in speech or letter owing to a habit of imposing too great and sudden a pressure on the brain. They should learn to let the brain "take the load" gradually, as an electrician would say. A moment of complete relaxation would rid them of the difficulty. In much the same way if a lecturer suffer from brain-fag and sudden forgetfulness of his sequence of ideas or inability to get a word, by far the wiser course is the bold one of "letting go" absolutely in momentary relaxation, rather than straining to remember, for the latter effort merely increases the tensity around the brain.

The student should also remember that concentration is not a matter of physical effort. The moment the mind turns to a thought it is concentrated upon it. It is difficult to express in words what, after all, must be experienced to be understood; but concentration is less a matter of forcibly holding the mind on a certain

thought than of letting the mind continue to rest on that thought in perfect stillness and quietude. Further, the student may realise, and apply for what it is worth in his own inner experience, the idea that the mental body and not the brain is the seat of thought, and that though in the initial stages effort must seem to centre on the task of quietening the brain, nevertheless concentration really concerns the mental body more than the physical brain.

THE WAY OF SERVICE

The Theosophical student should always remember that right motive is of primary importance in all work that he undertakes, and that only by dint of unselfish motive and the sincere desire to benefit humanity can the Masters be reached. It need not be that any intense love for humanity in the mass possess the aspirant in the earlier stages ; we may safely assume it is sufficient if he seek to act unselfishly towards those in his immediate environment, for as he perseveres he must inevitably become increasingly sensitive to the cry of suffering humanity in its collective aspect.

Yet it is well that the Theosophist who is awakening to some realisation of the spiritual life should understand that meditation and service are complementary to each other and that the best results will accrue when they are combined. We are not in the Theosophical Society just for what we can get out of it ; we are members because the teachings of the Eternal Wisdom have sunken deep into our hearts and are moulding

anew our lives. It is the mark of the spiritual man to give freely to others rather than to demand for himself; therein only is true happiness to be found. Hence our attitude towards the Society should be in the nature of a continual interrogation: What can I do to help?

The new-comer into the Society is given his opportunities and according to his capacity is judged by the use he makes of them. Small services well rendered often bulk larger than ambitious undertakings fitfully carried out. The student who is likely to progress is the one who is found faithful in small things, who is willing to clean windows and light fires in the Lodge room, to undertake various small duties at meetings, to be unfailingly regular in attendance at Lodge, or other meetings in which he has promised to take part, to train himself to lecture and write. No more need be said about this; a hint to the earnest student is sufficient, and the parable of the talents is extremely applicable to Theosophical work.

Along such paths of service will the way to the Masters be disclosed; for service willingly given must be the watchword of the aspirant and he will learn to forget himself and his own progress in the joy of ministering to the needs of others. Let him seek to perform every act of service in the Name of the Master; and so let him work onward in perseverance and steadfastness to the day when he shall know the Master face to face, and from the depths of his being offer himself in glad surrender to his Lord.

But let him not think that the relation between Master and pupil is in anyway one of coercion or one

in which the pupil's individuality is submerged in the flood of power from the Master. On the contrary, the Master's influence is not a hypnotic force from without but an inexpressibly wonderful illumination from within, irresistible because so deeply felt as in perfect accord with the pupil's highest aspiration and as the self-revelation of his own spiritual nature. The Master is himself in fullest measure a channel of the Divine Life and that which flows from Him awakens into activity the seed of Divinity within the pupil. Indeed the student who finds inspiration in scientific study may discover a suggestive analogy in the electric phenomenon of induction. It is because of the identity of nature in the two that the influence of the Master stimulates in the highest degree all the noblest and finest qualities in the pupil. The love of the Master for a disciple may be likened to the sunshine which opens the lotus bud to the fresh morning air, and very truly may it be said that one smile from the Master will call forth such an outburst of affection from the pupil as would only be gained by months of scholastic meditation on the virtue of Love.

May these few hints on Meditation win some to the knowledge of the Great Teachers and to the service of humanity in Their Name.

ACCENDAT IN NOBIS DOMINVS IGNEM
SVI AMORIS ET FLAMMAM
ÆTERNÆ CHARITATIS.